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THE ROLE OF INTERPOL IN COMBATING CBRN TERRORISM

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Abstract: Terrorist incidents involving CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) substances have long posed a significant threat to international security, offering a potent means for terrorists to cause large-scale casualties and lasting psychological, socioeconomic, and political impacts with relatively limited resources. This review paper aims to elucidate the role of INTERPOL in preventing the realization and escalation of CBRN-related terrorism. While some CBRN attacks have been successfully prevented, others have reached their targets, and many remain ongoing threats. This paper highlights INTERPOL's essential contributions to counter-CBRN terrorism and outlines its broader counterterrorism strategy, emphasizing its collaboration with the United Nations (UN) and member countries in line with global counter-terrorism frameworks such as the INTERPOL Counter-Terrorism Strategy the United Nations Secretary-General's 2018 Agenda for Disarmament, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1540.

Keywords: UN, INTERPOL, CBRN terrorism, incident

1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism poses a significant threat to international peace and security (Al-Rikabi, 2021), as it undermines the stability of societies (Carter & Amlôt, 2016), disrupts economic development (Cavallini et al., 2014), and can

lead to widespread fear and suffering (Ruggiero & Vos, 2015). Terrorist groups, driven by ideological, political, religious, or altruistic, use violence and intimidation to achieve their goals, often targeting civilians, critical infrastructure, and governmental institutions (Berman, 2011). The impact of terrorism goes beyond

immediate casualties, causing long-term psychological, social, and economic harm to individuals and communities.

One of the most dangerous forms of terrorism is that which involves Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) materials (Nazari et al., 2023). CBRN terrorism, which refers to the use or threat of using weapons made from hazardous substances, can cause large-scale destruction, mass casualties, and long-term environmental and public health crises (Szklarski, 2024). The threat of CBRN terrorism is particularly alarming because the materials used are capable of inflicting immediate harm and also have the potential to create fear and panic on a global scale.

The use of CBRN agents by terrorists could result in devastating consequences. Chemical weapons, for example, can cause severe injuries or death through exposure to toxic gases or substances (Chauhan et al., 2008). Biological agents can spread infectious diseases, leading to pandemics and widespread fear, as seen in past attempts to use biological agents for terrorism (Cenciarelli et al., 2013). Radiological and nuclear materials can cause long-lasting damage to the environment, health, and infrastructure, creating a humanitarian disaster and posing long-term recovery challenges (Bunn & Bielefeld, 2007). Overall, CBRN terrorism represents an highly sophisticated threat to international peace and security, one that demands coordinated global efforts to mitigate risks, protect populations, and ensure that international norms and laws are enforced to prevent the proliferation and use of these devastating weapons (Nikolić, Stanković, Kovačević & Dabetić, 2020).

On the international stage, terrorism transcends borders, meaning that no country is immune from the threat (Ernazarovich, 2021). Terrorist groups often operate transnationally, with members, supporters, and resources spread across multiple countries (Mbara et al., 2021). These groups may engage in cross-border activities such as financing, recruitment, and the trafficking of weapons, making it difficult for individual states to combat terrorism

on their own (Ghanei et al., 2008). A century ago, INTERPOL was founded with the goal of providing a neutral and trusted platform for national law enforcement agencies to securely exchange intelligence, while maintaining control over their sensitive information. From the outset, its mission has been to promote law enforcement collaboration for a safer world (Stock, 2023).

Interpol has an important role in combating the threat of CBRN terrorism. As an international organization comprising 195 member countries, INTERPOL facilitates global cooperation among law enforcement agencies, helping to coordinate responses to cross-border CBRN threats.

2. INTERPOL GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON CBRNE AWARENESS

During its 80th session in Hanoi, Vietnam, from October 31 to November 3, 2011, the ICPO-INTERPOL General Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing the unique challenges posed by crimes involving CBRNe¹ materials. Although these crimes have low occurrence rates, they carry significant human and economic costs. The Assembly highlighted the importance of intelligence-led, prevention-focused investigations for effective management. Recognizing that CBRN investigations and related operations require member countries to commit significant resources.

The resolution urges member countries to support INTERPOL's efforts in several ways:

- Supporting the General Secretariat: Members are encouraged to help INTERPOL's General Secretariat in its mission, which includes CBRNe intelligence analysis, prevention programs, and operational response.
- Backing the CBRNe Terrorism Prevention Programme: This includes providing member countries with regular intelligence updates, assisting in capacity-building, facilitating cooperation between experienced CBRNe units, and supporting members facing CBRNe-related incidents.

¹ E-explosives is included to account for explosive devices like bombs, improvised explosive devices etc. (Murtinger et al., 2021).

- **Seconding Officers with Expertise:** Countries with advanced CBRNe capabilities are encouraged to second officers to INTERPOL's General Secretariat, contributing specialized knowledge to enhance the program.
- **Valuing INTERPOL as a Multilateral Liaison:** The resolution highlights the INTERPOL CBRNe Programme as a valuable opportunity for international collaboration that can strengthen national and global law enforcement's readiness to prevent or respond to CBRNe terrorism (INTERPOL, 2011).

One of INTERPOL's main contributions is its CBRN terrorism prevention program, which focuses on enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to prevent, detect and respond to incidents involving hazardous materials. Through this program, INTERPOL provides training, technical expertise, and operational support, helping to build the capacity of member states to identify, interdict, and disrupt the trafficking of CBRN materials. To counter potential CBRNE attacks, INTERPOL conducts threat assessments, increases awareness among national law enforcement agencies, provides training, and shares prevention strategies (INTERPOL, 2013).

3. COLLABORATION WITH GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM FRAMEWORKS

INTERPOL works closely with global frameworks, notably the United Nations and other international organizations, to strengthen its approach to preventing CBRN terrorism. These partnerships support a cohesive, unified response to the growing risks associated with CBRN terrorism. Together with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), INTERPOL has initiated a five-year project to develop a Global Threat Study, examining the potential misuse of CBRNe materials by non-state actors. By drawing on threat assessments grounded in national law enforcement data, the study aims to advance the global community's capacity to address CBRNE threats (UN, 2020). These assessments should inform international support and capacity-building efforts,

especially through INTERPOL's CBRNE and Vulnerable Targets program, to enhance prevention and response measures worldwide.

4. THE INTERPOL COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY

INTERPOL's approach to supporting countries in countering terrorism covers five main areas:

1. **Identification** – Focusing on the detection and verification of individuals involved in transnational terrorist groups and their support networks.
2. **Travel and Mobility** – Strengthening border security to reduce the movement of terrorists and intercept networks that enable their travel.
3. **Online Presence** – Enhancing efforts to identify and prevent terrorist use of cyberspace for propaganda, recruitment, or coordination.
4. **Weapons and Materials** – Tracking and intercepting illegal flows of conventional weapons like firearms, as well as hazardous materials (chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear).
5. **Finances** – Monitoring and disrupting financial sources that fuel terrorism (INTERPOL, 2022).

These areas collectively enhance global cooperation, security measures, and the ability to effectively counter both traditional and emerging terrorist threats.

5. UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S 2018 AGENDA FOR DISARMAMENT

The United Nations Secretary-General's 2018 Agenda for Disarmament provides a framework to reduce the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and other strategic weapons, while strengthening international norms and disarmament frameworks. The nuclear risks we are currently facing are becoming more serious and are on the rise. This is compounded by a recent shift in

major military powers away from disarmament and arms control, which were once essential tools for lowering international tensions and improving global security. Technological advancements are also intensifying these risks, such as the growing vulnerability of nuclear weapons systems, their command and control structures, and early warning networks to potential cyberattacks. Furthermore, the ongoing development of missile systems with anti-satellite capabilities and space platforms that may be used for weaponry introduces new challenges to global security (UN, 2018). INTERPOL's collaboration with the UN supports the enforcement of international agreements regulating the use and trade of CBRN materials. By working together, both organizations help member states uphold disarmament principles, preventing these materials from falling into the hands of terrorists or rogue states.

6. UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1540

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) seeks to prevent the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, as well as their delivery systems, particularly by non-state actors such as terrorists. The resolution mandates binding obligations for UN member states to establish legal and regulatory frameworks to prevent the acquisition and misuse of CBRN materials by terrorists. INTERPOL plays an important role in supporting the enforcement of UNSCR 1540 by assisting member states with compliance, sharing best practices, providing technical support, and helping to develop national controls on CBRN materials. This effort aligns with the broader commitment to multilateral cooperation, especially through frameworks like the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, all

of which are critical to advancing non-proliferation and fostering international cooperation for peaceful purposes.

As the threat of CBRN terrorism continues to evolve (Koblentz, 2020; Prosser & Bonin, 2009; Walsh, 2021), it is essential that INTERPOL and its partners remain agile and proactive in addressing emerging risks. Advancements in technology, such as the development of new detection tools and enhanced intelligence-sharing platforms, will be critical in enhancing global efforts to counter CBRN terrorism. Furthermore, as the global security landscape shifts, new forms of terrorism may arise, such as cyber-enabled CBRN threats, requiring additional international cooperation and strategic planning.

7. CONCLUSION

INTERPOL contributes actively to countering CBRN terrorism by fostering international cooperation and providing specialized expertise to tackle these complex threats. In close partnership with the United Nations and other global frameworks, INTERPOL aids nations in preventing and managing CBRN-related risks while promoting compliance with international standards designed to prevent the misuse of hazardous materials. As CBRN terrorism continues to pose new challenges, INTERPOL's commitment to collaboration, intelligence-sharing, and advancing protective measures strengthens global security frameworks, supporting sustained peace and resilience in the face of emerging threats.

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УЛОГА ИНТЕРПОЛА У БОРИ ПРОТИВ ХБН ТЕРОРИЗМА

Резиме: Терористички инциденти који укључују ХБН (хемијске, биолошке, радиолошке и нуклеарне) супстанце дуго представљају значајну претњу међународној безбедности, нудећи моћно средство терористима да изазову велике жртве и трајне психолошке, социоекономске и политичке последице са релативно ограниченим ресурсима. Овај прегледни рад има за циљ да разјасни улогу Интерпола у спречавању реализације и ескалације тероризма повезаног са ХБН оружјем. Док су неки ХБН напади успешно спречени, други су достигли своје циљеве, а многи остају сталне претње. Овај рад истиче суштински допринос Интерпола борби против ХБН тероризма и описује његову ширу стратегију борбе против тероризма, наглашавајући његову сарадњу са Уједињеним нацијама (УН) и земљама чланицама у складу са глобалним оквирима за борбу против тероризма као што су Стратегија Интерпола за борбу против тероризма, Агенда генералног секретара Уједињених нација за разоружање из 2018. године и Резолуција 1540 Савета безбедности УН.

Кључне речи: УН, Интерпол, ХБН тероризам, инциденти